

If you have tried to get a passport in the last few months, you might notice that there's a bit of a backlog in the State Department's process. A backlog of up to four months! As co-chair of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus, I have pursued several different paths to help solve this problem.

First, I would like to acknowledge the amazing work done by my district staff to assist constituents who have run into roadblocks. At the peak of summer travel, my district offices were assisting up to 100 constituents a week who ran into problems getting their passports. I'm pleased to be able to help the Central Coast take much-deserved vacations!

I've also been busy back in Washington. New rules implemented this year required everyone flying to countries in the Western Hemisphere to have a passport. For over a year I warned the Department of Homeland Security that poor implementation would lead to a severe backlog in passport processing, and that's just what happened.

In June, the Department of Homeland Security finally acknowledged more than a year's worth of warnings and delayed the requirements until September. Their goal may be good safety policy, but poor implementation was unacceptable.

Their next step is to require all Americans driving or taking cruises outside the United States to have a passport, which will cause the same problems. To give the State Department time to prepare, I voted in the House Appropriations Committee to delay implementation until June 2009. When this legislation is signed by the president, it will help assure that in the future we don't face the same fiasco we did as this summer.

Don't hesitate to contact my district staff if you haven't received your passport within three weeks of your travel date. Reach my Salinas office at 831-424-2229 or my Santa Cruz office at 831-429-1976.

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